

# The Plastic Medicine People Circle

by Helene E. Hagan

Several individuals have recently brought to my attention that the phenomenon of new-shamanism, also styling itself as "core shamanism" is taking ample proportions in N. California. I have researched the particular group led by Sedonia Cahill and Bird Brother, known as THE GREAT ROUND organization. This group was targeted as it is typical of this New Age phenomenon, both in its practices and its public assertions as innovator and creator of ritual while proffering a public denial of its Native American character.

There are other groups advertising seminars, sweatlodges and vision quests as if they were indeed purveying true Indian teachings. All such groups follow the patterns followed by The Great Round in as much as they are imitators of Indian ways and are led by individuals who do not have any inside knowledge of American Indian spirituality.

## The Great Round teachings

These teachings are put forth in advertisement, brochures, flyers and newsletters in Native American terminology and symbols, as an invitation to a meaningful journey, Indian style. What indeed attracts followers is the opportunity to practice Indian ways, and the people who respond to this promotional material are not versed enough in Native American traditions to be able to tell the difference between the imitation and the real thing.

This phenomenon is prevalent in many parts of the nation, and is not restricted to the practices of Sedonia Cahill, Bird Brother and the Great Round. Indeed these two individuals and their group are just another group in a phenomenon which began with Sun Bear. Sun Bear isolated himself from his own community by "selling out" bits and pieces of Indian spiritual knowledge. He established the "Bear Tribe", composed of non - Indian followers.

Another individual who continues to hold influence in these circles is Hyemeyohsts Storm. This man stands in the background of the Deer Tribe, publicly headed by Harley Swift Deer Reagan. He carries the title of "General Storm." The Deer Tribe is composed of women's earth lodges and men's Metis Brotherhood lodges. For many years a number of Native American leaders have stated that Mr. Reagan is a Caucasian man who has adopted a false Indian identity, as have many of the people listed as venerable teachers by Sedonia Cahill, Bird Brother and The Great Round in their publications.

What makes these groups appear to be Native American, without being Indian or having proper Native American training and teachings, is the use of ceremonial pipes, smudging, the use of Indian names, the making of Indian paraphernalia such as "prayer arrows," tobacco ties, the use of feathers, the use of cornmeal and tobacco in offerings, the use of braided sweetgrass for blessings, the making of "medicine bundles", eagle feathers, the ceremonial use of medicine wheels with the four directions, Indian chanting to drums, the

practice of purification in sweatlodges and the vision quest. All these practices are the public outward aspects of North American Indian religions, and are well known to be so.

There is, however, a vast difference between the manipulation of objects, or the imitation of rituals on instructions gathered from readings and public knowledge, and the profound wisdom of spiritual practices of Native American people, still in the keeping of true medicine people who are unknown to the general non-Indian population of this network. People who are truly knowledgeable are the traditional elders of Indian nations, practitioners of various medicines, and a few anthropologists, writers, artists and people who have been invited to share in real ceremonies and do not write about, sell or divulge their experience.

The most common features of all these individuals Indians call "plastic medicine people" is the marketing of their limited knowledge, the offering of paying workshops, and the business aspect of their spirituality. All peddle the scant information they have gathered from a few discredited figures or textbooks which have a poor reputation both in Indian country and among anthropologists. This is evident in the reading list in the Deer Tribe Apprentice Manual and the Sedonia Cahill reading list for vision quests. The most common cliches all these people adopt are several statements: they have access to real Native American traditions; Indians do not have a monopoly on these traditions; they have been properly trained by qualified Indian Medicine people; and what they are doing has validity, meaning and cannot be contested.

They even trivialize the concerns of Native American elders, which they lately seem to reduce to such issues as "ownership of spirit," or "jealousy." Such trivialization and such distortion of the real central issues are not to be taken lightly. They hide cultural projections and indefensible acts of desecration.

## The Ceremonial Pipe

Though Native Americans of this continent used several forms of personal, social and ceremonial pipes, the teachings of the Sacred Pipe through The Buffalo Calf Woman came to the Lakota people alone (Circa 900 A.D.). This is a real event and not a myth, for it occurred in historical time, as a supernatural event recorded in Lakota sacred texts. It is indeed far more recent than the times of Jesus and the writing of the New Testament, or than the revelation of the Koran to Mohammed.

The Lakota are The Keepers of The Sacred Pipe, as the Cheyenne are The Keepers of The Sacred Arrows. No group has the right to usurp such functions, or to imitate specific ceremonies in any form or fashion without showing deep ignorance, blasphemy, or just looking very silly. In Indian tradition, those who imitate others are without true

understanding of what they are doing. They have no real identity and are considered "fools". All the individuals we will review later, quoted by Sedonia Cahill and Bird Brother as teachers, are considered by real Indians as such fools and clowns. I have personally worked with hundreds of dreams of Indian men and women, and the images of "clowns" ("Heyokas" and "Mudheads") often occur in Indian dreams in relationship to white "wannabe" people. These dreams frequently depict those people as being very immature, unruly children and associated with clown figures and acts. They also appear as being dangerous, causing distress and wreaking havoc. In addition, the dreams emphasize the grief of Indian people and the necessity for women to protect the Pipe from such white children.

Indian people recognize that these individuals do not know who they are, have little sense of true identity, and need to borrow false names and false origins in order to impress others and obtain a following. Sedonia Cahill invokes the story of the Buffalo Calf Woman before her Pipe ceremonies on the vision quests, linking what she does to the tradition of the Sacred Pipe, which is specifically Lakota Sioux. The Buffalo Calf Woman brought a specific message to the Lakota people alone. Only part of the message is known to the general public. The ceremonies built around The Sacred Pipe have a context and a meaning for the Lakota people.

When she appeared upon the Plains, the Sioux were a Warrior Society with ancient war rituals. The Buffalo Calf Woman emerged from the collective psyche of the Plains Warrior Society, and is meaningful in that context. To take this event out of context, and to assign arbitrary meanings to it today is improper. If these people advanced that Moses brought corn to his people in the desert, or Jesus taught his disciples how to build an igloo, it would be just as ludicrous as to pretend that The Buffalo Calf Woman is -watching over Sedonia Cahill's vision quests.

### **"Medicine" names, and the granting of honor feathers**

At the conclusion of some of her ceremonies, Sedonia Cahill, like Harley Swift Deer at the end of his "Hoksida Rituals" or so-called "Sun Dances," often gives her customers and Indian name and a feather like a "prize." However many of the questers take a name on their own. In Native American traditions, a name is bestowed, not self-given.

In real circumstances, Indian names are only bestowed upon non-Indians by Indians for specific, sustained and efficient work or contribution to an Indian community. An Indian name is an honor when it is thus acquired, meaningless if it is bestowed by a non-Indian such as Sedonia Cahill or Mr. Reagan. A feather is an honor which is rarely bestowed outside Indian circles. It acknowledges a specific contribution to the community, or a heroic deed for the protection of an Indian community. A feather and an Indian name given by a white woman to another white person carries no deep meaning. It is simply an imitative act without context or public communal significance. In Indian societies, the honor is a public honor, like a congressional medal. Socially, Sedonia Cahill's act has no such value. She, and many like her, IMAGINE that this is a great spiritual gesture, not knowing

that the real meaning of feather and namegiving is social recognition.

### **Medicine Wheels and teachings**

The terminology of The Great Round teachings is identical to that of Harley Swift Deer Reagan as worded in his Apprentice Manual. "Tonal" and "Nagual" shields are terms borrowed by both Mr. Reagan and Sedonia Cahill from Carlos Castaneda. Castaneda's work is not validated by Yaqui spiritual leaders (personal conversation between Helene Hagan and Alfonso Valencia, Spiritual Head, Pasquale Yaqui Reservation, Arizona), or in anthropological circles. Yet, Sedonia's reading list for vision quests includes his work, with the books of Lynn Andrews and others. Lynn Andrews has been instrumental in propagating the non-existent "Sisterhood of the Shields". She has been shown to peddle fantasy, and heads the list of "fake medicine people." The vision quest reading list also includes the writings of Jamake Highwater, a well-known Indian impersonator who actually was an Armenian ballet dancer in San Francisco.

Shields are associated with warrior paraphernalia and carry such a meaning in warrior societies of several nations of North America. They displayed honors obtained on the battlefield and were exhibited by the entrance of a tipi, as a coat of arms, so to speak. They carried no spiritual significance, but were held in great respect, for they depicted the high deeds of many valorous warriors. The making and use of shields by Sedonia Cahill and others is another misappropriation, distortion and abuse of meaningful Indian ways torn out of their contexts. The making of shields is part of Sedonia Cahill's and Bird Brother's teachings. There are many individuals in Northern California teaching the making of shields, as if it were an Indian ritual or ceremonial act of great spiritual significance.

### **The Sun Dance Ritual, the "Prune Dance," the "Flowering Tree Ceremony" and other such gatherings**

The specific indications that the teachings of the Great Round are connected to the practice of the Sun Dance which is strictly a Plains ceremony, is the statement on the part of one of the members of the group that some attend the Swift Deer Sun Dance and a photograph from her recently published book. Such practice of the Sun Dance, without understanding the profound context of Lakota society and the place of this ritual in that context, is a travesty of a sacred ritual. The parody of a ritual, divested of its original intent within a given community where all ritual phases are interlinked in a specific way, is quite evident in the spurious sun dances held outside Indian communities.

The Medicine Wheel, which is used for ceremonies and the structure of the Vision Quest, is borrowed straight out of General Storm's book *Seven Arrows*, and is also at the core of all Deer Tribe teachings. Thus, Sedonia duly acknowledges Harley Swift Deer on page 15 of her book: "I give special thanks...to Harley Swift Deer for his beautiful and inspiring Medicine Wheel Teachings".

(Other acts of desecration include) the Vision Quest paraphernalia such as making tobacco ties, making prayer arrows, cornmeal offerings etc. Imitations and borrowings from Indians in "playing Indian", buzzwords and symbols which grant an aura of "Indianness" to language and activities, for an appearance of authenticity.

## Symbols

The Coyote Figure is displayed consistently in The Great Round Newsletter. The Coyote is a Native American trickster figure. It often is the first teacher, an intermediary between the higher spirit and mortals, particularly prominent in teachings for children. Coyote stories are morality tales like Aesop's Fables and constitute a Native American literary genre. This figure is demeaned by Sedonia, Bird Brother and The Great Round, and used as a cartoon prop speaking slang or poor English. For instance, A Spring 1989 newsletter includes the following poem:

ONE LAST COYOTE POEM [Poem Missing]

## Activities

1. All ceremonies (pipe ceremonies, sweatlodges, vision quests, Indian chanting, medicine circles).
2. Various instructions on "how to" feather tying, making tobacco ties, making prayer arrows, making shields, making medicine bundles (including eagle feathers which are federally protected for use only by Native Americans), making amulets which include menstrual blood, pubic hair and fluids from genitalia.
3. Ancient gambling games like bone games.
4. Indian name giving, medicine name giving, honoring with feathers and using pipes. The use of the Pipe in a ceremonial way and the carrying of a pipe is by itself, without any other imitation or borrowing, a desecration of a ritual object sacred to the Plains people.

Based on the above list of linguistic habits, activities, symbols and publications, there is no doubt that Sedonia Cahill, Bird Brother and the organization of The Great Round, as do similar groups, present themselves to the public as teachers of Native American ways. They are indeed imitators, despite their claim to the contrary, to being "innovators and creators" of ritual, as put forward by Sedonia in her last publication (Summer 1992 Earth Circle News). "I have not known anyone in this community to copy ceremonies from any other people. We are innovators and creators.." Such a statement does not need any further elaboration, in the light of the review of the activities just described. The pretense to innovation and the denial of imitation ring false. These phrases, activities, and ritual behavior have been learned from "teachers" whom they name in their publications. Almost all of these "teachers" are themselves non-Indian, often considered impersonators of Indians, and not trained in Native American traditional ways.

## Expert and false teachers

"Teachers from these various traditions, including Native American teachers, have specifically shared rituals with the intent that they continue to be shared and taught". (Earth Circle News, Summer 1992 pg.3)

This statement is a double misrepresentation. Firstly, it refers to the "intent" of unnamed Native American teachers. There are no known real Native American Medicine Men and Women who have come forth in the non-Indian world to ask others to conduct and perpetuate Indian rituals and ceremonies. These ceremonies are performed by legitimate ritualists within their own communities for their own people. As noted elsewhere, some people have been invited to share these ceremonies, on and outside reservations, as participants and friends: they have always been specifically requested to respect their contents by not writing or talking about them publicly. This very matter is of crucial importance, and renders this statement by Alexandra Hart a falsification and distortion of reality. Secondly, in Native American circles, it is known that any Indian who has offered his teachings to outsiders was not a recognized spiritual leader of any nation, but had scant knowledge of the traditions. Such statements as put forth in the publications of The Great Round can only emanate from individuals who are not in communication with real American Indians.

Though it may seem that Sedonia Cahill, Bird Brother and the Great Round come recommended by a number of people, it is necessary to examine from whom the recommendations emanate. It is not unusual in those particular circles to find people who will praise such "plastic medicine people". Similarly, when Wilma Mankiller, Tribal President of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, questioned the HBO producers of the Cherokee Sex Workshop featuring the work of Mr. Harley Swift Deer Reagan, their response was that Mr. Reagan had come highly recommended: "...staff checked with Mr. Reagan and accepted a lot of reference material he provided, but did not check with the Cherokee Nation to find out if he was a legitimate medicine man or if the workshops he conducts are Cherokee sexual spiritual ceremonies as he claims....He has been doing these teachings for years. He has a very huge following." (Lakota Times, Article on Cherokee Workshop, Jan. 21, 1992).

Harley Reagan is only one of the several teachers Sedonia acknowledges in her writings and in her reading list for the preparation of her clients to the vision quest. There are also other comments by people who attend her circles, such as made by Harri Meyers in the above Lakota Times report of Jan 21, 1992. "Those who have studied Native American religions have studied with Harley Swift Deer. Several circle members studied with Mr. Reagan and go to Sun Dance with them, Mr. Meyers said." Also available is a Uvideo of the Cherokee Sex Workshop conducted by Mr. Reagan and shown by HBO for which the Cherokee Nation is demanding an apology on the part of its producers, and equal air time to offset the false impression on Indian authenticity..

Since information has recently come out publicly discrediting Mr. Reagan, Bird Brother has stated that he and Sedonia hardly know Harley Swift Deer have had little to do with his

teachings, and did one weekend workshop ten years ago. This statement and the bulk of information available on the link between The Great Round teachings and the Deer Tribe do not coincide.

I have already commented on Sun Bear, Carlos Castaneda, Lynn Andrews and Harley Swift Deer. I have also mentioned the background role of Hyemeyohsts "General Storm" who is denied authenticity by Indians, and Jamake Highwater, the Arenian ballet dancer impersonating a Blackfoot/Crow Indian. Other false teachers mentioned by Sedonia Cahill are: Evelyn Eaton, O'Shinna "Fast Wolf" and Shequish Ohoho.

A. Evelyn Eaton was a "medicine woman" of the Bear Tribe and of the Harley Swift Deer Tribe (both non-Indian groups). She also spoke admiringly of General Storm in her book *The Shaman & The Medicine Wheel*. Evelyn Eaton was a fiction writer with some twenty-three published novels.

B. O'Shinna "Fast Wolf" is of Irish and Scottish ancestry, and is currently impersonating an Indian woman of Native American ancestry which switches from Mohawk to Sioux to Apache according to the occasion. Her name was taken without permission from Calvin Fast Wolf, a Lakota man she encountered in Chicago. Furthermore she has been thoroughly investigated by Avis Little Eagle of the Lakota Times, who could not find any Indian lineage or tribal affiliation.

C. Shequish Ohoho is interviewed by Sedonia Cahill as part of her recent book, on pages 107-113: "She is a warrior woman of Shumash Indian ancestry. She is a very articulate teacher drawing on her own roots, Hopi and Apache training." I personally know Shequish. I also know that she came to the attention of Native American people two years ago as an impostor who pretended to have Shumash ancestry. I received a personal telephone call and a letter from the Chairman of a Shumash group south of Monterey. This phone call and a letter followed a Council meeting in which Shumash people took the decision to put a stop to Shequish Ohoho's activities in the Bay area as an "Indian woman."

A group of real Indian women of San Francisco led a protest against Shequish and effectively terminated her money making seminars and ceremonies in this area. Her real name and background are known to California Indians who have denied her any tribal affiliation.

Conclusion: Most of the teachers mentioned by Sedonia Cahill and Bird Brother are non-Indians, without tribal affiliation, and some are simply impersonating Indians with fake identities. At one point all have had some involvement with Sun Bear, a discredited Indian, or with Harley Swift Deer, a known "plastic medicine man" under coast-to-coast scrutiny. If these are the teachers Sedonia Cahill and Bird Brother hold in reverence, it is easy to establish that they are self-appointed teachers of no known Indian roots. Moreover, the majority of these people are known to Indians for having assumed false identities or promulgating improper teachings.

Whatever is based on false identity cannot pretend to truth. The source of Native American spirituality is strong identity, knowing who you are and acting straight from the core of

your individuality. Mental health is linked to truth and identity, and the very problems emerging from western societies in the form of mental breakdown, neuroses and psychoses, are caused by some form of lie at family or social levels. Whatever starts with an untruth cannot heal. Mental illness or health, truth and identity are fundamentally linked. A false identity cannot lead to mental health.

### Issues/Points of difference

"Certainly the Earth-centered movement is growing into its own use of ritual and healing techniques which have all the eclectic roots of our own melting-pot heritage, and have at their center perhaps more to do with current psychological knowledge than any other tradition." (Alexandra -Hart, pg 3, Summer 1992 of Earth Circle News)

Like Bird Brother and Sedonia Cahill, the people in such networks all purport to have a spiritual calling and to be legitimately trained in one or more Native American traditions. The fact of the matter is that they are not legitimate in the eyes of any Native American community, nor do they hold any seminar, conference or ceremonies among Native Americans. What they have in common is that they steer away from real Indians, do not interact with them and absolve themselves of any responsibility toward the Native American community, locally or nationally.

Furthermore, some have the audacity to claim that the Native American medicine people and elders are "jealous" of their "powers" (comment by O'Shinna Fast Wolf in the same issue), a ridiculous notion which only reflects the low level of esteem such commentators hold for Native American spiritual leaders and elders who are concerned about the proliferation of fake medicine people. Such statements deny Native American intelligence and wisdom, and ignore the very real possibility that legitimate traditionalists would know how dangerous the manipulation of partial ceremonial knowledge can be to the individual and collective psyches.

Traditionalists know how damaging someone who is not trained properly can be when manipulating psychic forces or invoking spirits of the depths without adequate preparation. It is this knowledge which impels the real spiritual Indian leaders to warn against these "plastic medicine people"-whether they call themselves "medicine" men and women, "shamans" or any other name. No Indian spiritual leader speaks of ownership of spirit, as they have been accused of recently in publications of *The Great Round*, as such notion is idiotic. To even advance such a notion can only stem from very ignorant people in matters of Native American spirituality. It also reeks of racism, for it belittles the intelligence of a group of people in such a way that can only be called racist.

When Sedonia and Bird Brother write or speak about ownership of spirit, they are showing childish ignorance of spiritual matters. Indians are not seeking to protect their ceremonies from being practiced by others who hold more "power". The issue of power is a very misunderstood one, indeed. It is one that involves the shadow of all individuals engaged in the healing professions in the western world. To

know how to relinquish power is the first step to spiritual understanding and the step missing from all New Age Indian teachings. People are getting very rich indeed in misleading others into quests for "powers" toward false values.

Rather, Indians are concerned that bits and pieces of their ceremonies are used and manipulated without discretion, in an ignorant manner as to their consequences. They are concerned that such actions, based on slavish imitation and improprieties, can cause damage to others, and that the very people who speak so loudly of their concern for mental health are engaging in unauthentic spiritual practices. Psychic damage has been known to result from such experiences. The individual may not be able to link it directly and it may show up in unpredictable ways months and years later. Native American spiritual leaders are fully aware of these dangers.

To belittle the knowledge of Indians, and to pretend that their practices can be taken over by non-Indians harmlessly are indications of non understanding and arrogance. To fabricate new ceremonies out of bits and pieces of various Indian rituals, out of the full ritual context in which they are embedded, is to create psychic monstrosities. This, the fake medicine people are unaware of. Rituals have a context. They are a part of an entire fabric of a given society, and one ritual is only a part of a whole. The balance is in the whole, not in the parts. And the whole is still the full practice within Indian circles, founded on ancient Indian traditions, for Indian people. Others can pretend to achieve identical results with only outward paraphernalia and a patchwork of gleaned information as to the steps of certain rites, but they do not have the key to the whole meaning, the whole context, and how the parts complement and fit each other. They are crippling other human beings by subjecting them to only bits or parts of a whole system, without having the keys to the entire mental system.

This is truly what is at stake and why Indians are concerned. They know these people do not have a clue and through arrogance, greed for money, for results, for power, for prestige, for followers, for validation of their fantasy trips, or from simple ignorance engage in improper behavior. As to the claim that rituals are "generic" and not specific to any group of people, one must indeed be a trained anthropologist to speak to that issue. Sedonia and Bird Brother are not. Rituals have contexts, are context specific and emerge from the collective unconscious of a particular group.

There are patterns which are embedded in an ecosystem, particular to a given culture and which function precisely and effectively for a particular group. It is Theodore Rosack who emphasizes that we are on the verge of discovering that the deep unconscious is not just sexual (Freud), or spiritual (Jung), but related to the ecosystem in which we live. And in that regard we must understand how Western people have diverged very far indeed from their unconscious in a destructive way. The destruction of the environment goes hand in hand with the destruction of our relationship to the unconscious, which is at its very depth our natural habitat and its indigenous populations. The recovery of this relatedness of all things can be accomplished as individuals, simply,

genuinely and honestly without external trappings or borrowed traditions.

Rituals have to do with the careful relationship to these depths and ways have developed among certain people to balance these forces which can affect the individual and collective mental health of a given group. Playing with rituals is a dangerous game and in this regard Westerners who play at being Indians are unaware and unconscious. That is why Indians are concerned. Such "plastic medicine people" are fooling around with mental health and in ways for which they are not properly trained by experts. It is not a question of dispute over who is right and who is wrong and who owns spirituality.

Furthermore, the views set forth by The Great Round publications that "rituals are generic" and can be borrowed from one group or another and passed around reflects abysmal ignorance as to the very specific qualities of ritual as it is elaborated by the collective psyche of a given group of people, and it is valid for them alone. No ritual can be borrowed. No ritual can be created as an innovation by one individual. In indigenous groups, innovation occurs only as it emerges from a vision or a dream of a member of that community and bears all the marks of having a collective meaning, and must pass the scrutiny of experts in that community. The contention, for instance, that the "Prune Dance" began to be practiced by these New Age people because some white man dreamt of the world as if it were dried up like a prune and therefore needed a new ceremony to juice it up, is a severe misunderstanding of the true nature of dream. That white man's dream referred to his white world and not to any Sun Dance, which is an Indian ceremony. It might have meant that this particular man's environment was like a dried prune. The white man's arrogance is boundless.

And while indeed the Spirit exists for each and all, and manifests in many ways, the way a human group relates to the earth is very specific. Each ritual, item, song or action exists in a very real context of family and social life in a group, and carries meaning within this very group, and not for other people. To borrow bits and pieces and create some hodgepodge for one's own benefit, financial or emotional, and as one wishes, is indeed the American way, but it is also very sad. It is as if Americans were so spiritually bankrupt that they did not have any inner resources to draw from and had to borrow from others the source of any inspiration. To peddle such hodgepodge to others for a fee, be it vision quest, sweatlodge or other ceremony, is taking advantage of the gullible and disoriented and to profit by it. This is the true essence of charlatanism.

In Native American traditions, the holy men and women, the spiritual advisors and medicine people hold different functions in society and have very different training. But all are sustained by their community without benefit to themselves. In return, they know that their primary responsibility is to their community, and should they depart from that path, seeking fame or glory or financial gain, they are leaving their true vocation and will be shunned. True humility and service to others are indeed their remarkable

qualities. They do not market themselves, do not publicize their skills and do not issue flyers. They work hard in silence and in true dedication to the welfare of others and they know well the dark forces which can overcome them should they depart from their obligations.

Indian medicine men and women train from childhood. They are not allowed to practice until they have undergone a long experience of the powerful spirits or psychic forces they will encounter first in themselves, long before they are singled out for specific healing tasks by others. They do not appoint themselves. Rarely does a medicine man or woman come to practice before maturity, for these very reasons. There is not a hint of this wisdom in any of the so-called teachings passed around in the "circles" forming around plastic medicine people.

## CONCLUSION

My contention has been that these individuals and the organizations they head at times represent themselves as purveyors of authentic Native American teachings-which they definitely are not-and sometimes as creators and innovators of important rituals gathered from various traditions (not

uniquely Native American) Sedonia and Bird Brother have also advanced at times that in ancient European traditions there were sweatlodges and medicine circles, and that they are therefore only reviving old traditions from their own Caucasian origins. If so, then, why do they use American Indian language and paraphernalia at all? The contention that sweatlodges and vision quests existed long ago among Celtic or Nordic people is not verifiable. There is no continuity of tradition in this regard in Europe. And if there is in their mind, they must adhere to the European mode of conducting these ceremonies and follow these Caucasian ways. Spirituality is embedded in language and collective memory. The fact is that no Westerner, European or Caucasian carries in his or her psyche the collective memory of American Indians of this continent. To pretend to that memory is a blatant falsehood which cannot be maintained. Both common sense and scholarly expertise recognize such falsehood.

*Helene E. Hagan is a psychological anthropologist who has worked with Native American issues for over a decade. She lived for four years on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota while working on an elder oral history project. This article is reprinted with permission from the INSTITUTE OF ARCHETYPAL ETHNOLOGY newsletter September 1992.*